

Frequently Asked Questions-Wild Pigs

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- 1- How many they average per litter and how often they can breed in a year?

The wild pig is the most prolific large mammal on the face of the Earth—but they are not “born pregnant”! The average is between 5 and 6 pigs per litter. Sows have approximately 1.5 litters per year. Are more litters per year and larger litter sizes possible? Absolutely yes! However, I am using long-term averages, not what can occur under ideal conditions -which usually unsustainable over the long haul. Young females do not typically have their first litter until they are 13+ months of age, even though they can be sexually mature at 6 to 8 months of age or even earlier in some cases.

- 2- What is the average lifespan of a wild pig?

Mortality rates vary greatly-impacting the very young and the very old primarily. Predation is not a big issue once they reach about 10 to 15 pounds. Hunting can be a significant mortality factor in some regions but generally is not enough to offset population growth. Depending on a variety of these factors, plus disease, vehicle collisions etc., average lifespan is probably between 4 and 8 years of age. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service surveyed landowners in 2011 to determine an estimate of how many wild pigs are removed from the Texas landscape each year. We estimated 753,646 wild pigs were removed by landowner-initiated efforts in 2010. This will help refine rate of population growth and population estimate models even more.

- 3- How heavy can they grow to?

Weights depend on genetic background and food availability. Generally, males can reach larger weights than females but this is not a hard and fast rule. Average weights vary but run 200 pounds for adult males and 175 pounds for adult females. A 300 pound feral hog is a large pig. The unusually large weights of 500 pounds + occasionally reported in the media are very rare.

- 4- What is the power of their bite? What other animal can it be likened to in that regard?

They have extremely strong jaws to crack open hard-shelled nuts such as hickory nuts and pecans. As they predate upon or scavenge animal carcasses, they can easily break bones and often consume the entire carcass, often leaving little if any sign behind.

- 5- How strong is their sense of smell?

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The wild pig's sense of smell is well developed (much better than both their eyesight and hearing) and they rely strongly on it to detect danger and search out food. They are capable of sensing some odors 5-7 miles away and may be able to detect odors as much as 25 feet underground! Appealing to this tremendous sense of smell is often essentially as fermented or scented baits can provide additional attraction to make them more vulnerable to trapping.

- 7- What are their eating habits, and how much they eat in a day?

Wild pigs are opportunistic omnivores, meaning they feed on plant and animal matter in addition to being able to play the role of a scavenger. They are largely indiscriminant in their feeding habits and eat both vertebrate and invertebrate animals. Approximately 85% to 90% of their diet is believed to be composed of vegetation (including crops where available) and 10% animal matter. Small pigs may eat approximately 5% of their body weight daily; larger pigs an estimated 3 % of body weight.

- 8- Do you have any documented proof of their violent nature? (Newspaper clippings)

Ample documentation exists of wild pig-human encounters. However, the likelihood of a human being impacted by a hog/vehicle collision or disease risk—while still low is greater than an actual physical attack by a wild pig. Where the rare wild pig attack occurs, it is usually during a hunting scenario where dogs are used to bay or corner a pig in a spot and the pig “runs through” the associated hunters standing nearby. Occasionally, humans inadvertently walk between a sow and her litter and the sow reacts to protect her young. Totally unprovoked attacks outside of these two scenarios are rare. Given a choice, wild pigs usually flee rather than fight. However, U.S. newspapers report from 5 to 7 human fatalities each year.

9- If impaled by a wild pig's tusk, what disease could you get from one?

Most likely, a human would be subject to an infection just as you would from suffering any deep cut or abrasion from any unclean surface.

10-How fast can they run and high can they jump?

Wild pigs can run up to 30 mph. They can jump over fences less than 3 feet high and have "climbed" out of pig traps with walls 5 to 6 feet high.. Therefore, traps with 90 degree corners must be covered on top because the pigs tend to pile up in that corner and literally climb over each other-- and the corner gives enough leverage for them to go over the top. Either use a 5 foot high trap with no corners (circular or tear-drop shaped) or cover the corners/top of the trap.

11-How do they sleep? (habits...i.e. burrow a den? Standing up?)

Wild pig can simply lie down and sleep, usually on their sides. They will actually construct "nests" that they use for sleeping as well as farrowing. Some are very simple depressions and others can be quite elaborate. Oftentimes, they simply seek out thick underbrush for security or root into a brush pile or downed tree top for security. In the hot months, they will often lie in mud and/or seek deep shade.

12-How hard they are to kill?

How hard are they to kill with what? Very hard with a sling shoot or BB gun! Seriously, most archers shoot wild pigs in the heart /lung region immediately behind the shoulder from broadside or at a slightly quartering away angle. Hunters using firearms are advised to shoot the pigs in the neck or in the vitals (heart/lung region). Preferred rifles for pigs are 25 to 30 caliber. Regardless of the caliber/weapon, shot placement is essential for a clean and ethical kill. Archers typically limit their shots to 25-30 yards to help ensure a clean kill.

13-What other animal would you liken their intelligence level to, and ability to learn to avoid traps?

Wild pigs are one of the most intelligent species (exotic or native) found in the United States. They learn to avoid danger very quickly and "half-hearted" attempts to control them just make them less susceptible to future control efforts. They respond to human pressure via avoidance.

14-What is the average cost of property damage they inflict in Texas? Total cost of annual property damage?

A 2004 survey conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service placed annual damage to agriculture in TX alone at \$52 million with an additional \$7 million spent by landowners to attempt to control the pigs and/or correct the damage. This is indeed a very conservative estimate. Other researchers suggest that damage per pig per year averages \$200-- but the problem there is that the assumption is made that a 40 pound pig causes as much damage as a 300 pound pig, which is unlikely. The total pig population in Texas has been estimated recently (2011) at 2.6 million. However, estimates for the United States population as a whole are non-existent but “guesstimates” place that number between 4 million and 8 million animals. Some reports estimate total damage in the U.S. may be \$1.5 billion annually— However, these damage estimates are in part based on population estimates—but again, a figure we don’t have a good handle on nationwide.

15-Do they use the same trails to get from place to place? If so, why?

Wild pigs are creatures of habit and will use the same bedding/resting areas and feeding areas as long as the food source remains available. However, they are capable of moving great distances to find food. Human disturbance/pressure will make them alter their patterns of movement. They do have some affinity to their “home range” which can vary from a few hundred acres to several thousand acres based on food availability and pressure. A 2011-12 telemetry study of adult female wild pigs in east Texas resulted in home range estimates of approximately 2 square miles, or 1,000 -1,200 acres.

16-What so they do to damage trees specifically?

The most sensitive environmental areas wild pigs damage are wetland areas and they can alter the vegetative community present. They compete with native wildlife for hard mast (e.g., acorns from oak trees). Their rooting can accelerate leaf litter decomposition causing the loss of nutrients which can impact seedling survival of trees. Their rooting behavior can damage seedling tree growth and survival. Longleaf pine seedlings seem to be especially vulnerable to wild pigs. Research suggests that the pigs may actually root up seedlings of various tree species and chew the root system to obtain nutrients. They rub against individual trees (pines) that are capable of producing a lot of rosin (presumably as they rub to remove ectoparasites on their skin). Rubbing of selected pine trees has resulted in girdling of some mature trees which can eventually kill the tree.

17-Are older boars loners? If so why do we think that?

If you see a large wild pig traveling alone, 101 times out of 100 it is a boar. The mature boars become more solitary, or sometimes travel with a small number of other large boars. They only join up with sounders when a sow comes into heat.

18-When does a sow abandon its litter and when do they separate?

Within a few days of giving birth, a pregnant sow will leave the group in order to farrow. They may remain apart for 2 to 4 weeks then rejoin the group. They really don't "abandon" their litter over time. A "sounder" is a family group of pigs made up of sows (typically related via about 3 generations) and their piglets. Pigs are completely weaned by about 3 months of age, although they have been observed eating solid food (e.g., corn) at as young as 2 weeks of age. About 80% of the yearling females remain with the sounder and the rest disperse. Young males disperse from the sounder at about 16 to 18 months of age. There is some research that supports the idea that sounders can become territorial--but not the individual pigs.

19-What kind of damage are they capable of on a wire fence?

Wild pigs do a great deal of damage to net wire fences which are generally used to confine sheep and goats. They tear them up or lift them up off the ground to gain access and therefore leave "holes" that sheep and goats can pass through.

20-What kind of foods are they most attracted to when trying to trap them?

One size does not fit all when it comes to baits. However, research by Dr. Tyler Campbell with USDA-APHIS/WS suggests that wild pigs are attracted to baits that have a sweet pungent odor, such as strawberry or berry flavorings. Hence, you will see several commercial "pig baits" that contain some type of strawberry flavoring based on this research. Many baits will and have worked and landowners are encouraged to vary baits among traps to find out what pigs find most attractive at a particular location or season. However, the more abundant the food supply, the more difficult it is to attract pigs to these baits. Shelled corn is often used, but landowners have also been successful by fermenting corn, milo, rice, oats, etc. to increase the odor attraction. Old fish grease, catfish "stink" baits and overripe fruit and vegetables have also been used successfully. Others have used maple syrup on corn. Some recent research in the southeast has indicated that while catch rates were no different between shelled corn and soured corn, although we do know from experience that non-target species (e.g., raccoons, deer, crows) use of shelled corn will be much higher than a soured grain product.

21-We seem to hear a lot of “things were fine until a year ago” remarks by people with wild pig issues. Why the seemingly sudden boom in population and fearless invasion of residential neighborhoods?

I once made the comment that “There are but 2 kinds of landowners in Texas: Those with wild pigs and those that are about to have wild pigs”. They have steadily increased their range by moving northward and westward over the past 25 years. They have also gone from being a rural land/agriculture issue to an urban/suburban issue as well by moving into these more populated areas that are adjacent to adequate habitat that provides cover, security and food. Why the population explosion over this time? Several reasons converged to create the “perfect storm” resulting in the boom. 1) Indiscriminant stocking to new habitats by landowners and hunters facilitated rapid increase—pigs cannot fly but they can be trailered and released. This was done regularly (–DESPITE BEING ILLEGAL) in the 1970’s thru the 1990’s—and the stockings were very successful at re-establishing wild pig populations across the state. 2) Supplementing non-migratory wildlife (deer, turkeys quail etc.) is legal in the state of Texas. For example, an estimated 300 million pounds of shelled corn are fed to deer annually in Texas. However, non-target species (e.g., wild pigs, raccoons) get their fair share of this supplement. As a result, the sows that are on this higher nutritional plane because of their access to the unintended supplement allows sows to produce more eggs, have larger litters and have more pigs in their litters survive. 3) Wild pigs are the most prolific large mammal on the face of the earth. They are not “born pregnant”, but their high intrinsic (built-in) rate of increase when environmental conditions are favorable can allow for rapid population increases. Population increases are not just a Texas phenomenon—for various reasons, populations have expanded in many states and now some 48 states have established wild pig populations.

22-Where do they originate from?

Pigs were domesticated some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. There are believed to be multiple areas of origin in both Europe and Asia. Polynesians brought domesticated pigs into the Hawaiian Islands around 700 A.D. The first pigs were brought into what is now the continental U.S. into Florida in 1539 by Hernando de Soto. Explorers used these pigs as a traveling food source. After wandering around the southeastern United States in search of gold, his exploration party brought 700 pigs into what would become Texas in 1542.

23-What’s the difference between a pig, hog and a boar, and are their different species?

All are descendants of a common ancestor-the Eurasian wild boar. The term Wild boar is typically used to describe Eurasian wild boar from Europe or Asia. Feral hogs are those that originated from domestic breeds but may be the result of a few or many, many generations in the wild. In the U.S., the best descriptor is probably to refer to them simply as wild pigs. Regardless, the Eurasians and domestics gone feral are largely the same species and therefore will interbreed with no problems resulting in all sorts of “hybrids” between the 2 groups. None of these should be confused with the javelina, a native pig-like mammal found in the American southwest that is not even closely related to wild boars/wild pigs/feral hogs.

24-Is there any use their bones, tusks or hair have in objects? (brushes, jewelry, leathers, etc.)

None that I know of. Their meat is consumed by humans. In fact, from 2004-2009, some 461,000 wild pigs captured in Texas were federally inspected and commercially processed for human consumption in the U.S., Europe and Asia.

25-Is it true that they use of mud as sun screen and to keep them cool? Does the mud help them with anything else?

Pigs have no functioning sweat glands and therefore they can be sensitive to high temperatures. During hot weather, they typically are associated more with cool shady places with water sources and tend to confine their movements at night when temperatures cool down. I don't agree that they are using mud as a sunscreen as much as they are using it to cool off in order to remain comfortable...

26-Do sows ever eat their young?

Never say never-- but I would not term it as “common or routine behavior”. There are instances where they have been known to scavenge on pig carcasses.

27-How do they interact with other animals? Any they hang with or avoid?

Most other wildlife species don't associate with wild pigs. The less mobile (lizards, toads, snakes) may end up being their next meal, while others (e.g., white-tailed deer) typically vacate the immediate area when wild pigs show up. They can be competitors with native species for certain food supplies such as acorns and limit the availability of those food sources for less aggressive native species.

28-Are there methods of communication with each other and how loud is their squeal. Would squealing act as a warning to other pigs of danger?

Squeals can serve as a means of communicating (between sows and young, as a warning between wild pigs competing over a food source or as a danger warning to other pigs).

29- Is Swine Flu a legitimate danger from wild pigs, and how abundant is it? (i.e. 1 out of every 10 pigs can spread flu...?)

NO-Wild pigs do not cause swine flu.

30-What is the estimated population of wild pigs in all the United States?

We do not have estimates based on scientific data for the entire U.S, we have guesstimates. Most experts would agree that it is somewhere between 4 million and 8 million animals but this estimate is not based on good data. There is a real need to conduct surveys to establish baseline population data. In Texas at least, these data do exist from 8 studies and thru the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) an estimate has been made at 2.6 million head. We are also getting a handle on the Texas wild pig population rate of population growth. Based on recent studies, we estimate that annual population growth in Texas is approximately 18-21%. At that rate (if left unchecked), the population would take about 5 years to double in size. However, collectively we are doing everything in our power to make sure the population is not left unchecked.

31-What is the estimated world population of wild pigs?

Some countries in Europe and Asia feel they have a better handle on their total populations of pigs and some of these census techniques are just now being employed in the U.S.

32-What is the estimated annual dollar amount of destruction caused by wild pigs in the entire U.S.?

Some reports place the total damage figure as high as \$1.5 billion in the U.S. annually. That is based on a damage estimate of approximately \$200 damage per wild pig hog per year and the pig population of 6 million animals. However, if the population estimates (guesstimates) are wrong-- so is the total damage estimate. Again, that assumes that all pigs cause the same amount of damage, which is untrue based on their size as well as where they live (e.g., lower value rangeland vs. higher value cropland).

33-Is there some kind of census about the nation's wild pig population? What we're trying to find is how fast the population has grown, and at what rate they are continuing to grow.

No, there are guesstimates of from 4 to 8 million but researchers are working on finding better methods to estimate populations by state so we can gain a better handle on the total U.S. population. Anything you read in print right now on total U.S. populations is a pure guesstimate that is not based on scientific data. Our research work resulted in an estimated Texas population of about 2.6 million animals as of 2011.

34-When were wild pigs introduced to our soil?

1539-- In what is now Florida by Hernando de Soto. These 13 pigs were originally domestics released to be used as a future food source by the explorers. De Soto captured these particular pigs in Cuba and brought them into what is now Tampa Bay, Florida. Obviously there were some escapes during the exploration and these pigs became the seed stock for future wild pig/feral hog populations. The wild pig herd that accompanied De Soto's party increased to approximately 700 head by the time the exploration entered into what is now Texas in 1542.

34. Number of professional wild pig eradication companies in Texas?

We have no way to track these companies. A number of individuals do offer control services in the state and can be found via internet searches. Those that trap pigs usually retain the right to them market them to a buying station for processing or sell males (boars and barrows) to hunting preserves. Several helicopter services offering aerial hunting for wild pigs are also operating in Texas.

35. Where are the worst damage problems in Texas?

Anywhere we have wild pig populations we seem to have problems. From an agriculture standpoint, cropland damage results in higher economic impact than rangelands or pasturelands. More recently, damage to greenscapes in urban and suburban settings have resulted in considerable economic impacts as well.

36. How many pigs are caught each year?

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service surveyed landowners in the Spring of 2011 to determine how many pigs they removed by all legal means from the Texas landscape in 2010. A total of 697 survey respondents controlling 1.8 million acres from 137 Texas counties removed 36,646 pigs in 2010. Trapping represented 57% of the total and shooting 35%. Dogs removed 6% of the total

and snares removed just 2%. Of the “shooting” category, only 11% of the total pigs removed were taken by hunters.

Based on this survey, we estimate 753,000 wild pigs are removed each year. We also know that from 2004- 2009, 461,000 hogs were federally inspected prior to slaughter at TX processing plants. These pigs were generally trapped then sold to buying stations. However, this is only a percentage of the pigs kept for home use or taken by hunters. Several studies suggest that annual hunter harvest averages 24% of the population--but these data are also lacking. It takes between 50% and 70% of a population to be controlled annually just to hold the numbers stable from one year to the next (Our population model suggested 66% had to be removed to hold the population stable). Therefore, recreational hunting alone cannot keep a population in check.

37. What diseases do they carry and are they harmful to other animals?

Approximately 15 diseases can be carried by wild pigs. However, swine brucellosis and pseudorabies are two examples of diseases of concern. Recently while testing wild pigs for brucellosis, researchers at Texas Tech documented the presence of tularemia in a large number of hogs tested. Tularemia can be transmitted to other animals and humans, Pseudo can be transmitted to other animals and swine brucellosis can be contracted by humans. Our recommendation is whenever you are field dressing hogs, use proper precautions (latex gloves and eyewear). Obviously, the biggest threat is disease transmission to domestic swine herds.

38. What are the different species of pigs typically found in Texas?

There is but one species (Sus scrofa) in the United States-- but many breeds are involved as most of our wild pigs today are originally from domestic stock. There are about 8 species of hogs in the genus Sus (think of them to 2nd cousins to our wild pigs) but about 18 subspecies of Sus Scrofa (1st cousins) found worldwide. All of our modern domestic breeds as well as our wild pigs originated from a common ancestor--the Eurasian wild boar that was first domesticated some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago in Europe and Asia.

39. Are inroads being made in the wild pig problem?

Our Texas AgriLife Extension Service 2006-07 study clearly showed that we can reduce the economic impact of wild pigs on agricultural enterprises by 66%. That does not mean we significantly reduced the total population— However, it does show that concerted control efforts can abate damage significantly. Excellent research is being conducted investigating the use of

both contraceptives and toxicants that could lead to additional tools for control in the future.

40. Do Texans understand the severity of the problem?

At one time, the wild pig issue was strictly considered to be an agriculture/rural issue in Texas. However, over the last decade, wild pigs have increasingly impacted urban/suburban areas of the state—including all the major cities, by damaging greenspaces (i.e., lawns, parks, sports fields) and by increases in vehicular collisions causing damage to vehicles and in some cases humans. More urban Texans are now aware of the issues relative to wild pigs.

41. Does the nation/Washington D.C. understand the severity of the problem?

At an Invasive Species Conference held in Washington D.C in 2010, several presentations were made regarding wild pigs and their impacts. So, efforts are being made to spotlight the issue in not only Texas but also in the other 46 or so states they now inhabit.

42. What are the wild pig's habitat preferences?

Typically, wild pigs will seek out the heaviest cover near water they can find where they are not harassed, then range out from there to feed. The habitats vary greatly across the range of the feral hog in the United States and even in Texas—from fairly arid regions in south Texas and the trans-Pecos of west Texas all the way to the heavily forested pineywoods and wetlands in eastern Texas. They must have sufficient food, water, cover and living space. If one or more of these requirements are not met, they can be extremely mobile and move to new areas that meet all of their habitat needs.

43. What impact do wild pigs have on our deer population in Texas?

Deer hunting in Texas is annually a \$2.2 billion industry. Wild pigs impact white-tailed deer in 3 ways: 1) they compete (and often out-compete) deer for native mast (e.g., acorns) as a food supply in the Fall, 2) they compete for supplemental food sources (forages, corn fed as bait for hunting and protein supplements) that are meant for deer. We feed 300 million pounds of shelled corn annually in TX, with a good portion of that feed going to non-target species such as raccoons and wild pigs. Last Fall, shelled wildlife corn had a retail cost of \$20 per 100 pounds. We are making our wild pig population larger by feeding white-tailed deer where they share habitats. Now, this is Texas and we are not going to stop feeding deer, so we need to exclude feral pigs from deer feeders. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and TAMU-Kingsville conducted a study in 2009 that showed that feeder pens at heights of 28" and 34" effectively denied wild pig access to supplement without significantly impacting deer access. Cost per circular feeder pen is about \$170

for six 16' panels x 34" and 12 t-posts, and 3) deer don't tolerate pigs very well and typically vacate the immediate areas when pigs show up at feeder locations/stations.

44. Which trap doors work best?

Recent research in Alabama and confirmed in Texas has shown that continuous catch doors (saloon, roter and swinging door gates) do not continue to catch additional wild pigs once the door is tripped. Therefore, the use of drop (guillotine) gates can be added to the list of effective trap doors or gates. Current research in Texas is also being conducted on the width of gate openings. Camera data previously suggested that many adult pigs have an aversion to entering narrower (<3 feet) gate openings. However, research findings have not confirmed this. Regardless, wider gates may reduce the training time necessary for adult wild pigs to enter traps.

45. Are all traps the same?

Recent research in Georgia has shown that the catch rate in corral traps is 4 times higher than in box traps. Also, boars have exhibited an aversion to entering the smaller box traps. Additional Alabama research found that boars spent an average of 32 minutes per visit to a bait/trap site while sounders spent 70 minutes per visit on average. Also, sounders made twice as many trips to the sites as compared to boars. In Oklahoma, researchers caught more pigs per unit of effort using drop nets as compared to corral traps. They are currently investigate the effectiveness of a "hybrid" trap that combines the attributes of a corral trap and drop net. Regardless, one study showed that 73% of pigs that were trapped and marked were recaptured at a later date. Lastly, one study found that 10 of 12 traps (83%) captured additional pigs within one week of pigs being euthanized in the traps. This suggests that blood left in a trap is not necessarily a deterrent to other pigs.

46. If I capture wild pigs in a trap, what can I do with them?

In Texas, landowners/trappers can hold live wild pigs for up to 7 days. If they plan to hold them longer than that, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) must inspect and approve the holding facilities being used. According to TAHC regulations, females can be sold to permitted buying stations (check the TAHC website for a complete listing of these facilities) found across the state, which is a good method of recouping part of one's trapping and damage repair costs. Male wild pigs can be sold to a permitted buying station or a permitted hunting preserve. Of course many landowners/hunters/trappers prefer to process the wild pig for home consumption.

47. What are some other sources of information on wild pigs?

Two websites that can provide additional information include:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's wild pig website: <http://feralhogs.tamu.edu>

**National Wild Pig Community of Practice website:
www.extension.org/feral_hogs**

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